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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 003944

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SUBJECT: GENERAL ABIZAID WITH ABU DHABI CROWN PRINCE: IRAN,
IRAQ, AFGHANISTAN

REF: ABU DHABI 3835

Classified by Charge Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

¶1. (S) On the evening of October 9, CENTCOM Commander General John Abizaid and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ) Al Nahyan discussed Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan. On Iran, MbZ pressed for clarity on U.S. "war plans" and called for closer coordination than he said he had seen on Iraq. He looked forward to the October 19 Gulf Security Dialogue as an opportunity to discuss contingency planning, with a focus on keeping the oil flowing. MbZ noted the lamentable history of Iraqi politics under Saddam and cited the danger of "gangs" loyal to religious leader Moqtada Al-Sadr. MbZ said the UAE had made no decision on boosting its troop numbers in Afghanistan to 1,000, yet would be sending an additional 50 troops soon. He discussed UAE efforts to calm extremism in southern Afghanistan, with a focus on schools, mosques, and clinics. He called on Saudi Arabia to make similar efforts on the Pakistan side of the border. End summary.

North Korea - Iran

¶2. (C) MbZ said Iran was "very nervous" about its situation in the international community and said he would be watching to see how Iran reacted to the North Korean nuclear test. He compared East Asia (which is home to many stable countries) to the Middle East, where a potential arms race was a much more complicated "nightmare." He said Iran was determined to gain a nuclear capability; neither the UAE nor "even Israel" knew Iran's true plans, he lamented (and "they know more than us").

Iran - Gulf Security Dialogue

¶3. (S) MbZ asked about the upcoming October 19 Gulf Security Dialogue in the context of protecting the flow of oil from the Arabian Gulf in the event of an Iran crisis. He said a lapse in oil traffic of even one day would be difficult for markets to sustain and quipped about building a pipeline to Oman when Abizaid suggested the Iranians could conceivably close the straits of Hormuz for some days (but that they would quickly lose any military encounter).

¶4. (S) Lamenting the absence of concrete consultations with the U.S. on Iran contingency planning, MbZ said "until now, we have not sat down and talked about it." "That has concerned us," he added, pressing Abizaid for details of current USG planning. He said Iranian President Ahmadinejad was prone to miscalculation and easily provoked. It was a matter of time before he would make a costly mistake, implied MbZ, noting the "interesting" remarks made by the Iranian President during the recent crisis in Lebanon. "He was very close to making a wrong decision." Ahmadinejad will attempt to influence events in the Iraqi south and with Hizballah, he said, retaining the "last card" of blocking the oil flow as a last resort. He said it was important for the U.S. and the UAE to talk about details of "the plan" for defending the Gulf. He stressed that he did not want to see decisions taken prior to a request for UAE coordination "as happened in Iraq."

¶5. (S) The UAE hosts over 300,000 Iranian tourists annually, said MbZ, and was home to 200,000 permanent residents from Iran (some estimates run even higher). MbZ said these Iranians were wealthy and influential (and did not include "those we don't know about"). He suggested that the UAE border with Iran was as difficult to control as the U.S. "border with Texas." With a high level of Iranian influence within the UAE, MbZ said "we know we will be hit from within" in the event of a conflict. "We will deal with that," but "need to know your plan" and don't want to be told of a decision at the last minute. "If you coordinate you can count on us," he concluded. Abizaid reviewed the importance of good contingency planning. He stressed the need to be prepared in terms of air defense systems, nonproliferation

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efforts, missile defense, and shared early warning to contain Iranian ambitions. He commended the upcoming Gulf Security Dialogue as an opportunity to coordinate more closely in these areas and build mutual capabilities.

¶6. (C) MbZ agreed that it is "important to have contingency plans" and to "talk to each other in preparation for the future." He reiterated that Iran was prone to miscalculation and adventurism -- "it's going to happen" -- and our common message should be clear. "Don't let them think they can get away with it." MbZ said the UAE was geographically doomed to be involved one way or another in any Iranian attack by "missile, plane, or Special Operations Forces." Responding to Abizaid's comment that Iran could cause trouble, yet could not win in a military engagement, MbZ asked rhetorically "if he's going to pick a fight" in any case, might it be best to "make him think he could win?" MbZ said the UAE Air Force was interested in Link 16 communications systems, enhanced training in air-to-air operations, and consideration of the "best options" in air defense. He welcomed the opportunity to have these issues reviewed (including in the Gulf Security Dialogue).

Iraq

¶7. (C) Noting the complexities of Ramadan, MbZ opened a brief discussion on Iraq by asking if Iraqi soldiers fasted during the holy month and inquired when the U.S. might start reducing its forces there. Abizaid noted that each Iraqi unit had a slightly different character, but that overall they were at 95% of our target in terms of numbers trained. More work was required, he noted, in the areas of chain of command and logistics. MbZ said his view of PM Malaki's strength as a leader had not changed since his previous conversations with Abizaid, yet accepted Abizaid's comment that the PM's government was showing increasing strength.

¶8. (C) MbZ lamented that Iraq suffered from two generations of a Baathist regime, Wahabi-ism, and a Jihad mentality. He said the U.S. Army contingent which clashed with Moqtada

Al-Sadr forces at an Iraqi mosque some time ago "should have gone all the way," adding that it was difficult to combat "gangs" led by a religious hard-liner. Dialogue with the Baathist regime had even been easier, he said.

Afghanistan

¶9. (S) Recalling his visit to UAE troops in Afghanistan three weeks previously, MbZ said his forces "seemed to be doing fine." He cited UAE plans to send an additional tank platoon (approximately 50 troops -- a move which had been relayed to the USG in a letter a few days prior to this meeting). He said his Chief of Staff felt this plus-up could make a useful contribution in supporting existing special operations troops in Afghanistan (about 250 personnel) and would involve rotations of members every few months. Regarding longer term plans to increase its presence, MbZ acknowledged UAE consideration of sending 1,000 soldiers yet noted that the UAE "could not make that decision yet." He said the new unit being sent soon would give the UAE a better picture of the feasibility of sending more troops within 3 to 4 months.

¶10. (C) MbZ asked whether Pakistani President Musharraf was sufficiently in control of security issues; he also asked about the legitimacy of a rumor that Pakistan might be building a "500-mile wall" along its border with Afghanistan.

A fence with Pushtun on both sides would be difficult to maintain, noted Abizaid. They discussed the numbers of Pushtun along the border (approximately 20 million) and MbZ remarked that more would keep attacking coalition forces if we simply kept killing them. Abizaid cited the need for an economic component to working with the Pushtun population; MbZ said the Pushtun did not "need much" to sustain their simple way of life.

¶11. (S) MbZ said the UAE was working with Afghanistan in the south of that country to tamp down extremism. UAE intelligence forces were working with Afghan Pushtun who had worked for some years in the UAE -- and who total 40,000 from Helmand Province alone -- in an effort to calm the region.

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MbZ quipped that such a number of Afghanis could even sway election results. He said the goal was to "penetrate" two areas in the south: the clinics and the mosques. Mosques were linked to schools, he noted, and thus schools also needed to be built to keep religious extremists out of the education process. "Don't let the mosque be the school." He suggested that the UAE was taking its clerics to "penetrate the mosques" in the area. He said President Karzai was agreeable to this effort, which he hoped would begin to show results within 2 to 3 months.

¶12. (C) As for the Pakistani side of the border, MbZ suggested that Saudi Arabia should be pressed to fill a similar moderating role. He commended the Saudi decision two days earlier to "halt all overseas charity funding" as a "good" and "strong decision." He said that over the past 36 years, Saudi Arabia had invested 70 to 80 billion dollars in "Wahabi-ism" and that this new decision was a clear indication of a change of direction. He suggested that Saudi should help "put the right men in the right place" in Pakistan while the UAE worked in a similar direction on the Afghan side of the border. (He suggested the USG might discuss such a program with Prince Bandar.) MbZ said we could "keep killing" forever without making progress if we do not connect our efforts with the economic situation of the people. Abizaid agreed that Presidents Karzai and Musharraf needed to recognize that they faced a common extremist enemy and coordinate to fight it.

¶13. (U) General Abizaid approved this message.

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